DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 782 JC 850 414

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TITLE Instructional Strategies for Effective Teaching in a Multilingual Vocational Classroom.
PUB DATE May 85
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual National Conference on Teaching Excellence and Conference of Administrators (7th, Austin, TX, May 22-25, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education Programs; Community Colleges; English (Second Language); *Immigrants; *Limited English Speaking; Refugees; *Teaching Methods; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS Houston Community College TX; Vocational English as a Second Language

ABSTRACT

With the influx of increasing numbers of limited English speaking (LES) people into the Houston area, Houston Community College has implemented a number of programs to provide vocational training to LES adults. The first program was the Indochinese Program, later called the Refugee Program, which has assisted over 36,000 refugees since 1976. Program participants receive survival English as a Second Language (ESL) training until they are able to enroll in a vocational or technical training class offered in English. The main problems with the Refugee Program have been the lack of time available to bring the student to the level of English fluency required in the workplace, and the frustration experienced by students and instructors at the length of time required to reach a level of employability. In order to deal with this problem, a bilingual vocational training program was initiatated. In this program, vocational instruction is offered in the native language, with ESL instruction offered concurrently. As the student's English fluency increases, English is used in the vocational classroom. As successful as the bilingual vocational training program has been, it has not solved all of the difficulties involved in providing services to students in a mainstream vocational classroom made up of speakers of a variety of languages when the instructor is monolingual English speaking and the instructional materials are not available in the students' languages. Resolving these difficulties depends upon the instructor's willingness to provide the tools, information, and guidance needed; and upon the use of outside resources such as ESL instructors, the media department, and student volunteers. (AYC)

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INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING IN A MULTILINGUAL VOCATIONAL CLASSROOM

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Presented at the 7th Annual
National Conference on Teaching Excellence
and
Conference of Administrators

May 22-25, 1985

Austin, Texas

JC 850 414

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Instructional Strategies for Effective Teaching in a Multilingual Vocational Classroom

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Houston Community College System

Houston Community College was authorized on May 8, 1971 by mandate of the voters of the Houston Independent School District, and on August 30, 1971 the College began operations with 5,711 students enrolled in its occupational and technical education programs. These programs were designed to prepare students for immediate employment in skilled and semi-skilled occupations and to provide supplementary training for upgrading job skills of people already employed. Current enrollment of both part time and full time students is more than 58,000.

Since its beginning fourteen years ago, the Houston Community College System has made excellent progress in keeping up with the rapid growth and change that have been occurring in the city of Houston. Instruction is offered at thirty one locations all over the city, and training is offered in over seventy career categories. The College makes every effort to provide its services to all of the Houston community and to insure that the services it offers are relevent to the community's needs.

One area of need that has provided the greatest challenge to the college is that of providing educational services to Houston's ever increasing limited English speaking population. An apparently bottomless job market, an appealing climate, and close proximity to Mexico have made Houston a Mecca for immigrants and refugees from Latin America as well as other parts of the world. In addition to the Hispanic community which

accounts for more than 10% of the city's population, there also are sizable numbers of newly arrived people from Veitnam, Cambodia, Laos, Afghanistan, Ethiopa, Poland, Russia, and Romania. The Census Bureau numbers the total of representatives of these groups at slightly less than 58.000 people.

With such a significant number of people in the community whose native language is not English, it becomes clear that an extra effort must be made to provide these people with worthwhile training opportunities that will enable them to become productive members of the community. What will be addressed in this session today is what is being done at Houston Community College, specifically in the Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Department, to address the difficulties encountered by both trainees and instructors faced with a multilingual, multiethnic classroom situation with a variety of limited English speaking students.

As this problem of limited English speakers became more apparent, different solutions were examined, each of which has its own benefits and shortcomings. The first program to deal with the limited English speakers who sought training at the College was the Indochinese Program, which later became the Refugee Program. The Indochinese Program and its successor provide vocational and technical training to the groups of people arriving in Houston from the various war torn regions of Indochina. Participants are given survival ESL training until they are able to enroll in a vocational or technical training classroom and understand the lessons which are offered in

English. This approach has helped over 36,000 refugees since 1976, but it still has some areas where it falls short.

The main problem that arises is the lack of time available to bring a newly arrived individual to the level of fluency required for him/her to function in an English speaking workplace. The time it takes to bring the trainee to a level of employability, both vocationally and in terms of communication skills, often creates frustrations for the trainee and the instructional staff. This is in spite of the fact that English classes continue even after the student is enrolled in a vocational or technical classroom.

In order to deal with this problem, the college sought and was awarded funds from the United States Department of Education for the development and implementation of a bilingual vocational training program. This type of training differs from that used in the Refugee program in that the vocational training is offered concurrently with the ESL instruction, and is given in the trainee's native language at first. The ESL class deals only with communication skills required on the job, and the subject matter dealt with in the ESL class is based upon what is being taught in the vocational class at that time. As the trainees become more fluent in English, the vocational instructor gradually increases the demands made on them to speak English in the vocational classroom. Using this approach it has been shown that a severely limited English speaker can become employable, both in terms of language and job skills, in about the same length of time required to train a native English speaker in the same job skills.

As successful as the bilingual vocational training programs at Houston Community College are, they are still not able to solve all the difficulties in training limited English speakers from the community. The success of these program is attributed to the fact that the vocational training is offered, at first, in the trainees's native language. English is gradually substituted as the trainees develop speaking and comprehension skills, but there is always communication between the instructor and the student. This would not be possible in a learning situation with trainees who speak a variety of languages, unless of course the instructors were multilingual and instructional materials were available in all of the different languages used by the students. This, of course, is not likely to occur.

The question, then, is what can be done to provide services to students in a mainstream vocational classroom made up of speakers of a variety of languages when the instructor is monolingual English speaking and the instructional material available is not in the trainees's language?

The answer lies within two specific areas. The first, naturally, is the instructor and the effort he or she is willing to put forth to help the limited English speakers. The creativity the instructor has at his or her command for developing learning activities and instructional materials for the limited English speakers in the classroom is an important factor.

The instructor must use creativity in providing the tools, information and guidance needed by a learner to finally

internalize a lesson. In 1925 the famous german psychologist, Wolfgan Kohler, was working on an island off the coast of Africa with some captive chimpanzees. To exemplify some aspects of "cognitivism", Kohler hung a bunch of bananas from the top of a chimpanzee's cage out of the beast's reach. Then Kohler hung a burch of bananas from the top of a chimpanzee's cage out of the beast's reach. Then Kohler put two old crate in the cage. After puzzling over the situation for a moment or two, the ape stacked one crate atop the other and climbed to the bananas.

The chimp, in Kholer's view had preceived all the elements of the situation, the crate and the food, as related to each other, and had an insight to the solution of its problem. Kohler believed that insight was an important tool of learning and a key to problem solving, and dealing with it.

Unfortunately too many instructors are training technical education students by supplying them with only some of the ingredients of a lesson and expecting the student to figure it out for him/herself. It does not take the most perceptive student to determine that this is not teaching excellence or even quality education. In order to reach students in a multilingual classroom, the demand for a creative approach to guiding the learner to insight and learning cannot be over emphasized.

The second area of importance in helping the limited English speakers is the extent to which the instructor is able to utilize outside resources. In most institutions there are ESL instructors, a media department, and even people in the student body who would lend their expertise to the vocational classroom if only they were asked. Let us examine in greater detail what

the instructor can do on his own; and how the outside resources can be more fully utilized.

The teacher's first responsibility is to learn as much as posible about the cultures of the students who are attending the class. Different groups have unique ways of perceiving authority figures, different attitudes towards learning, and different expectancies of the instructor. They also have specific ways of viewing and dealing with other members of their own and other cultures, and distinct ways of viewing the world which might effect their success in the classroom and on the job.

The Orientals hold a teacher in such high regard, that they won't ask any questions when they don't understand an English statement by an instructor because they don't want to lose face. To counteract this problem they must be encouraged when called upon in class to answer questions concerning previously covered material. They should also be informed privately that these questions are being made to help them rather than make fun of them. I have discovered they will start to slowly participate more and more in class discussions and question and answer activities.

Learning about the cultural differences of the students and how to deal with these differences will make us more effective in our role as teachers. We will also more effectively prepare our students for employment in American society. The instructor who is familiar with the student's culture will find it much easier to establish a healthy rapport with them and demonstrate his/her interest in the student as an individual.

Since it is not likely that the average vocational classroom will have instructional material available in foreign languages, the instructor will have to try to find ways of translating key lessons and safety procedures to insure that they are mastered by the learner. The best and cheapest source of these translations is found among the students can usually be called upon to help, and it gives them a feeling of pride and accomplishment to demonstrate their knowledge of both English and their job skill. Most of the translations used in the Basic Air Conditioning Program at Houston Community College were done by students and ex-students.

In some instances, other faculty members can be called upon to assist in the translation of material. They might be instructors in language programs or simply people who have knowledge of some of the languages being used by students in the vocational class. This resource is less effective than use of bilingual students due to time constraints felt by instructors who are carrying out their own responsibilities and the lack of familiarity of non-vocational instructors with vocational subject matter.

A third means of obtaining translations is through the use of a bilingual or multilingual teaching aid. This is only possible in programs with high enrollment and /or a generous budget, and it is still difficult to find candidates for the position who speak more than one or two of the languages.

Instead of depending solely upon translations, the vocational instructor can try to rewrite some of the more complicated job sheets and informational materials, or have

someone from the ESL department of the institution do this. Here we are assuming that the trainees have some grasp of the English Language, however limited, and that the simplification of instructional material will allow more to be assimilated. The ESL department is the most appropriate resource for the rewriting of material because they are more likely to be familiar with obstacles that the limited English speakers must overcome. The ESL staff can also help with the design of learning activities which teach English at the same time that they develop vocational skills and knowledge. The students like this type of activity because it reinforces what was being learned outside of the vocational classroom.

An important department of any educational institution is the media development center, and this center can be extensively utilized by a vocational instructor faced with the task of developing multilingual curriculum materials. There are many film strips available for English speaking students that make use of an accompanying cassette recording. Simply having someone re-record the cassette in the target language provides you with professional quality visuals and an understandable soundtrack which the limited English speaking student can make use of. Transparacies can also be developed cheaply and erasable markers can be used to include captions in the appropriate languages of the learners. This approach has the advantage of being adaptable to meet the differing needs of each new group of students.

Finally, a very useful instrument for preparing instructional meterials in a variety of languages is the video

camera and accompanying copiers and dubbing machines. A videotape can be produced by the instructor, using either students to carry out the procedures or demonstrating them him/herself. Copies of this tape can then be made with the sound dubbed in, using speakers of the target language instead of English. This approach provides the flexibility required of a frequently changing student body, and it is also relatively inexpensive once the equipment is acquired.

It is also quite helpful for the instructor to develop as extensive a library as possible of textbooks, pamphlets, and other training materials in languages other than English. Surprisingly enough, these materials are not that hard to come by. There are numerous book sellers who specialize in texts in other languages, but there are also organizations who specialize in compiling and disseminating vocational materials, language training materials, and a wide variety of related information to anyone who is interested. Some of these organizations are:

*Evaluation, Dissemination, and Assessment Centers

*Curriculum Coordination Centers in Vocational Technical Education

*The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, Rosslyn, Virginia

*State vocational educational departments

The material needed to effectively teach the major groups of limited English speakers found in our vocational classrooms is available to those instructor who are willing to take the time to seek it out. All that is needed is that little extra effort.

I hope that the information included here will be useful to those monolingual English speaking instructors who are faced with the difficult task of training people whose native language is one other than English. For me, this task is not only challenging, but also most rewarding. Knowing that I have played a major role in helping our citizens of the future to establish themselves in our society and not be dependent upon social services to survive has given me a true sense of pride and satisfaction. In addition, having representatives of so many different cultures teaching me about themselves and their countries has broadened my charactoer and added a great deal to my understanding of our world.

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AUGUST 30, 1985